

Presidential elections in France: the ?Unitary Left? shatters

Tue, 13/03/2007 - 23:00

The campaign for the French presidential elections, due on 22 April and 6 May, is now in full swing. The two front-runners: Nicolas Sarkozy for the right wing UMP party and Ségolène Royal for the Socialist Party (PS) have already launched their campaigns. Sarkozy is in the lead. These elections come on the heels of intense class struggles over the last two years ? the successful campaign against European Constitution, the uprising by youth in the banlieues (the neglected outer suburbs of French cities) and the mass youth struggle against the CPE in 2006.

Against such a background we might expect the Left to be optimistic . However, it looks increasingly that the five candidates to the left of the PS will experience a decline in their votes. This has led to bitter arguments on the anticapitalist left and within the LCR itself.

In 2005, during the campaign for the Left ?Non? in the referendum, an alliance emerged between the French Communist Party (PCF), ATTAC (the anti-globalisation organisation), LCR and even a fraction of the PS around a limited critique of neo-liberalism. In towns and neighbourhoods across the country, several hundred collectives were formed and continued political activity after the Referendum.

The LCR expressed great hopes for this alliance, even seeing it as the embryo of a new party encompassing both PCF and LCR and others. Since the downfall of the USSR the LCR has stated repeatedly that the distinction between reform and revolution is not a fundamental one for a new party or a government. It need only be ?anti-neoliberal?.

A united left?

Based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the PCF?s real intentions, a comedy of errors began. Finally, after a series of national aggregates of the collectives, the PCF refused to sign a statement that they would not enter a neo-liberal government with the PS. The PCF, with its much larger if less active membership, easily mobilized a majority sufficient to defeat the LCR?.

This should not have been any surprise to the LCR. Since the 1980s the PCF has several times served as junior partner in Socialist Party coalitions, supporting policies like the large-scale privatisations of the Jospin government. It needs pacts with the PS to preserve its shrinking base in the town halls and regional assemblies, not to speak of the French parliament. It is in short a reformist party to which such things matter above all else.

However the LCR, by suddenly walking out of the collectives, and deciding to stand Olivier Besancenot, appeared to be splitting over reasons it had not hitherto claimed were important. It is therefore not surprising - given their platform differed only in the degree of radicalism of its reforms, - that the right wing of LCR led by Christian Piquet, plus the remnants of British SWP supporters in France, have called for Besancenot to stand down and support farmers? leader José Bové. Some have even threatened to

campaign for Bové.

Of course it is unprincipled to politically support a candidate, like Marie Georges Buffet, who makes it clear she will join a Royal government given half a chance. But it would be unprincipled to enter any capitalist government, even a self-proclaimed 'anti-neoliberal' government without the PS. Why? Because it is one that would attack the gains of the workers and defend the interest of the bosses. It would support France's military actions, its corporate plundering of the semi-colonial world. Events in Italy show this beyond a shadow of a doubt.

After the debacle of the Unitary Candidature, the LCR but has to face the undemocratic hurdle of gaining the support of five hundred mayors or regional councillors. 16th March is the deadline for sending in the endorsements required and the candidates who have successfully surmounted this hurdle will finally be announced on 20th March.

The LCR's programme

Olivier's program calls for permanent contracts for all, an end to flexible working and overtime, a wage increase of 300 euros, a minimum wage (SMIC) of 1500 euros per month. It calls for renationalisation of privatised industries and the rejection of neoliberal reforms in the health service and education, citizenship for the sans papiers, the abolition of the Senate, the 'monarchical powers of the presidency' and a Constituent Assembly to replace the Gaullist Fifth Republic.

Where it is totally silent is on how to fight for these demands. For example, the 'prohibition of all sackings.' Who will prohibit them and how is not included in this programme. Is it simply to be voted by deputies in parliament? Is it by working class direct action, imposing workers control and creating a workers government? Likewise on getting rid of the Fifth Republic: what sort of republic will replace it- a capitalist one or one based on workers' councils?

Whilst Olivier claims his programme is 'anti-capitalist' the revolutionary struggle necessary to expropriate the capitalists, create a socialised and planned economy and to smash the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state, on all these questions the programme is silent. This programme is left reformist, not revolutionary.

Despite our criticism of the LCR's platform and tactics we believe that Olivier Besancenot is the only candidate who could claim to represent the key struggles over the last few years and rally the most class conscious and militant forces to his campaign.

For this reason revolutionaries should give him critical support, participate in his campaign and prepare the ground for the next round of attacks, whether from the Gaullist Sarkozy of the 'Socialist' Royal. We will argue for an action programme of resistance to Sarkozy and Royal and for a new workers party, built by mass forces in the unions and the whole range of anticapitalist, anti-racist, anti-war movements. We say from the outset that any new party must have a revolutionary programme and a democratic centralist party organisation.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/presidential-elections-france-%E2%80%99unitary-left%E2%80%99-shatters>